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MAILED

SEP 20 2010

In re Patent No. 5573519	:	OFFICE OF PETITIONS
Issue Date: 11/12/1996	:	
Application Number: 08/526379	:	DECISION ON PETITION
Filing Date: 09/11/1995	:	
Attorney Docket Number:	:	
1234.001	:	

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b),¹ filed on May 21, 2010, to accept the delayed payment of a maintenance fee for the above-identified patent.

The petition is **dismissed**.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(e) must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. No extension of this 2-month time limit can be granted under 37 CFR 1.136(a) or (b). Any such petition for reconsideration must be accompanied by the petition fee of \$400.00 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(f). The petition for reconsideration should include an exhaustive attempt to provide the lacking item(s) noted below, since, after a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further

¹ A grantable petition to accept a delayed maintenance fee payment under 37 CFR 1.378(b) must include

(1) the required maintenance fee set forth in § 1.20(e) through (g);
(2) the surcharge set forth in § 1.20(I)(1); and
(3) a showing that the delay was unavoidable since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent. The showing must enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the date and the manner in which patentee became aware of the expiration of the patent, and the steps taken to file the petition promptly.

reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Director.

The patent issued on November 12, 1996. The first maintenance fee was timely paid. The second maintenance fee could have been paid during the period from November 12, 2003, through May 12, 2004, or with a surcharge during the period from May 13 through November 12, 2004. The patent expired at midnight on November 12, 2004, for failure to timely pay the second maintenance fee.

Petitioner states that registered patent practitioner Peter L. Berger ("Berger") was retained by the inventor, Walter A. Zohmann, to prosecute the application for patent and to pay the maintenance fees. Berger timely paid the first maintenance fee.

Petitioner states that no notice was received from Berger when the second maintenance fee was due, and that the second maintenance fee was not paid.

Petitioner had also included a declaration from Berger, which states, in pertinent part:

5. My electronic docketing system includes an entry dated May 7, 2004, which states: "Case to go abandoned per PLB." It was my practice at that time to enter such a notation into the docket-expressing my instructions to allow the patent to go abandoned-only when I had received verbal or written instructions from the client that the patent should be allowed to go abandoned.

6. I have no recollection of sending Walter Zohmann any communication regarding the second or third maintenance fees, nor do my records reflect that any such correspondence was sent to Mr. Zohmann.

7. While I had several discussions with Mr Zohmann concerning snow skiing and his move to Utah, I have no specific recollection or record of receiving any verbal instructions from Mr. Zohmann specifically stating that his '519 patent should be allowed to go abandoned, except as set forth in paragraph 5

8. The only other record I still possess on this matter is an electronic copy of the July 23, 2000 reminder letter I sent to Mr Zohmann in connection with the payment of the first maintenance fee

9. The hard-copy files relating to the '519 patent were destroyed in 2007 in connection with an office move

The Director may accept late payment of the maintenance fee if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Director to have been "unavoidable".² A patent owner's failure to pay a maintenance fee may be considered to have been "unavoidable" if the patent owner "exercised the due care of a reasonably prudent person."³ This determination is to be made on a "case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account."⁴ Unavoidable delay under 35 U.S.C. § 41(b) is measured by the same standard as that for reviving an abandoned application under 35 U.S.C. § 133.⁵ Under 35 U.S.C. § 133, the Director may revive an abandoned application if the delay in responding to the relevant outstanding Office requirement is shown to the satisfaction of the Director to have been "unavoidable". Decisions on reviving abandoned applications have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable.⁶ However, a petition to revive an application as unavoidably abandoned cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing the cause of the unavoidable delay.⁷ In view of In re Patent No. 4,409,763,⁸ this same standard will be applied to determine whether "unavoidable" delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.378(b) occurred.

There are three periods to be considered during the evaluation of a petition under 37 CFR 1.378(b):

(1) The delay in reply that originally resulted in expiration;

(2) The delay in filing an initial petition pursuant to § 1.378(b) to revive the application; and

² 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1).

³ Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09 (Fed.Cir.), cert. denied, -- U.S. ---, 116 S.Ct. 304, L.Ed.2d 209 (1995).

⁴ Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982).

⁵ In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (PTO Comm'r 1988).

⁶ Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (Comm'r Pat. 1887) (the term "unavoidable" "is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business"); In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (D.C. Cir. 1912); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (Comm'r Pat. 1913).

⁷ Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

⁸ 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), aff'd sub nom. Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (table), cert. denied, 502 U.S. 1075 (1992).

(3) The delay in filing a *grantable* petition pursuant to § 1.378(b) to revive the application.⁹

This petition lacks the showing required by periods (1) and (2).

With regard to period (1), this petition does not satisfy the requirement of 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3). The statements presented in the petition fail to satisfy the showing required to establish unavoidable delay within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.378(b).

With regard to period (1), above, a delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of "unavoidable" delay, provided it is shown that:

(1) the error was the cause of the delay at issue;

(2) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance;

(3) and the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.¹⁰

An adequate showing requires:

(A) Statements by all persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them.

(B) Petitioner must supply a thorough explanation of the docketing and call-up system in use and must identify the type of records kept and the person responsible for the maintenance of the system. This showing must include copies of mail ledgers, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing, and include an indication as to why the system failed to provide adequate notice that a reply was due.

(C) Petitioner must supply information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error,

⁹ See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice, 62 Fed. Reg. 53131 at 53158 (October 10, 1997).

¹⁰ See MPEP 711.03(c) (III) (C) (2).

degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

The present petition lacks the showing required by (1), (2), and (3) above.

At the outset, it is not clear whether petitioner has provided statements from all of the persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. Specifically, petitioner must explain whether Berger docketed the maintenance fees himself, or had employees perform this task. If employees of Berger, rather than Berger himself, were responsible for docketing and tracking the maintenance fees, statements as referenced above must be provided by those employees. Further, petitioner must supply a thorough explanation of the docketing and call-up system in use and must identify the type of records kept and the person responsible for the maintenance of the system. This showing must include copies of mail ledgers, docket sheets, filewrappers and such other records as may exist which would substantiate an error in docketing, and include an indication as to why the system failed to provide adequate notice that a reply was due. Lastly, petitioner must supply information regarding the training provided to the personnel responsible for the docketing error, degree of supervision of their work, examples of other work functions carried out, and checks on the described work which were used to assure proper execution of assigned tasks.

Moreover, Berger's notation in the file that the patent was "to go abandoned," as described in paragraph 5 from his declaration, suggests that Berger himself notated the docket to indicate that the that the patent should be allowed to expire.

As such, petitioner must explain whether the notation described in paragraph 5 from Berger's declaration was completed by an employee of Berger, or by petitioner's registered patent attorney himself. Assuming, *arguendo*, the notation was made by an employee of Berger, in error, rather than Berger himself, petitioner must provide a statement from said employee, explaining the circumstances surrounding the error and why the error occurred: petitioners must provide statements from any of the persons with direct knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. Petitioner must also provide the information set forth in the preceding pages regarding a showing of docketing error.

On the other hand, if the notation in question was made by counsel (in this case, Berger) himself, in error, such error would not be considered a clerical error, but rather a mistake on the part of counsel.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office must rely on the actions or inactions of duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of the applicant, and applicant is bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions.¹¹ Specifically, petitioner's delay caused by the mistakes or negligence of his voluntarily chosen representative does not constitute unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 133.¹²

A delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP does not constitute an "unavoidable" delay.¹³ A delay caused by an applicant's lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP is not rendered "unavoidable" due to: (1) the applicant's reliance upon oral advice from Office employees; or (2) the Office's failure to advise the applicant of any deficiency in sufficient time to permit the applicant to take corrective action.¹⁴

With regard to counsel's assertion that Berger's files were destroyed in an Office move, it is noted that while this event is unfortunate, it does not relieve petitioner of the burden to provide a documented showing that the delay was unavoidable in accordance with 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3).

With regard to period (2), as enumerated above, petitioner states that petitioner learned that the subject patent had expired "in late December of 2009." The subject petition was not filed until May 21, 2010, at least four (4) months after petitioner learned that the patent had expired. In this regard, petitioner must provide a documented showing that the entire delay, from when petitioner learned that the patent had become expired, until the date the subject petition was filed, was unavoidable.

¹¹ Link v. Wabash, 370 U.S. 626, 633-34 (1962).

¹² Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N. D. Ind. 1987); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 130, 131 (Comm'r Pat. 1891).

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ See In re Sivertz, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm'r Pat. 1985); see also In re Colombo, Inc., 33 USPQ2d 1530, 1532 (Comm'r Pat. 1994) (while the Office attempts to notify applicants of deficiencies in their responses in a manner permitting a timely correction, the Office has no obligation to notify parties of deficiencies in their responses in a manner permitting a timely correction).

As the showing presented is insufficient to establish unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 133 and 37 CFR 1.137(a). Thus, the petition will be dismissed.

Petitioners should note that if this petition is not renewed, or if renewed and not granted, then the maintenance fee and post-expiration surcharge are refundable. The \$400.00 petition fee for seeking reconsideration is not refundable. Any request for refund should be in writing to the address noted below.

There is no indication that petitioner herein was ever empowered to prosecute the instant application. If petitioner desires to receive future correspondence regarding this application, the appropriate power of attorney documentation must be mailed. A courtesy copy of this decision will be mailed to petitioner. However, all future correspondence will be directed to the address of record until such time as appropriate instructions are received to the contrary.

If petitioner desires to receive future correspondence regarding any Maintenance Fee Reminder which may be mailed concerning this patent, a Fee Address should be submitted to Maintenance Fee Division.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Mail Stop Petition
 Commissioner for Patents
 P.O. Box 1450
 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By FAX: (571) 273-8300
 Attn: Office of Petitions

By hand: Customer Service Window
 Mail Stop Petition
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

Telephone inquiries should be directed to the undersigned at 571-272-3231.



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